

The battle of sexes – Ingratiation, gender and LMX

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Abstract

The hypothesis that subordinate ingratiation and subordinate gender will interact to influence LMX quality, such that ingratiation will have a stronger positive impact on LMX relationships for female subordinates than those for male subordinates was tested with a sample of employees (N=164) working in a large organization in Eastern India. Evidence in support of the hypothesis was found. The implications of this result have been discussed.

Leader Member Exchange theory talks about a high degree of mutual influence and obligation between superiors and subordinates, and asserts that such a relationship will result in several important positive outcomes such as lower turnover, higher subordinate performance, citizenship behavior, commitment and satisfaction. The theoretical concept is grounded in the social exchange theory (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Leader-member exchange theory suggests that an interpersonal relationship, based on social exchange evolves between supervisors and subordinates against the background of a formal organization wherein *"each party must offer something the other party sees as valuable and each party must see the exchange as reasonably equitable or fair"* (Graen & Scandura, 1987: 182).

The ability to influence subordinates, peers and superiors is a major determinant of managerial effectiveness. The success of an influence attempt by a manager is likely to depend on a number of things, including the influence tactics used by the manager, intrinsic attributes of the request that motivate the target person to comply with it, and manager's power. Ingratiation is behavior that is intended to make someone feel better about you and more receptive to request. Some of the ingratiation forms that are useful for a proactive influence attempt are – agreeing with the person's opinions, praising the person on past achievements, emphasizing on the person's unique qualifications, being sympathetic about the problems caused by your request, being sensitive to person's moods.

Power Tactics (Ingratiation) and LMX

Influence tactics affect the evaluative concepts that supervisors form about their subordinates. Supervisors' general trait and evaluative concepts of subordinates are related to the quality of exchange between them. Two type of employee behavior may influence supervisor's perceptions: Upward – influence tactics, and performance – related behaviors (Dienesch and Liden, 1986).

Impression management is a type of upward influence behaviors that employees exhibit, which may affect supervisors' cognitive processes and perceptions. Subordinates frequently use ingratiating in their attempts to make a positive impression on their supervisors (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980) and to receive desirable rewards in future (Bohra & Pandey, 1984; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). Bohra & Pandey (1984) used a scale that included seven major ingratiation tactics: other-enhancement, opinion conformity, self-enhancement, self-depreciation, instrumental dependency, name dropping, and situation-specific behaviors.

In terms of impression management, the successful use of ingratiation by a subordinate may lead a supervisor to form a positive impression of that subordinate and to attribute desirable qualities to him or her. These positive attribution and impressions may lead to favorable categorization of the employee by the supervisor. This in turn may then influence the supervisor's immediate responses to the employee, such as affect, and later decisions about the employee including performance ratings and behaviors related to exchange quality. Deluga & Perry (1994) found positive correlation between subordinate performance and higher quality exchanges though they theorized that subordinates who are seen to be contributing and have competency in their task would enjoy higher quality exchanges.

In several laboratory experiments, various kinds of ingratiation tactics increased the target's liking for or affect toward the ingratiator. Examples include, other enhancing communications and self-enhancing communications and favor doing (Wortman & Linsenmeier, 1977), and opinion conformity (Bryne & Rhamey, 1965). In turn, liking is related to the supervisory responses, such as reward behavior (Kipnis & Vanderveer, 1971; Podsakoff, 1982) and performance ratings (e.g.

Cardy & Dobbins, 1986; Kingstorm & Mainstone, 1985; Tsui & Barry, 1986). Moreover, Deluga & Perry (1994) found support for a positive association between subordinate Ingratiation including opinion conformity, other enhancement & self-presentation and higher quality exchanges. Studying the impact of subordinate disability on leader member exchange relationships, Collela & Varma (2001) found support for a positive association between Ingratiation and LMX quality.

Ingratiation may also influence exchange quality by biasing supervisor judgements of subordinate performance. Kipnis and Vanderveer (1971) found that a subordinate who engaged in Ingratiation received highly positive performance ratings that were at a level similar to the performance ratings given to high performers. Wayne and Ferris (1990) hypothesized that subordinates' impression-management tactics and performance affect supervisor- subordinate exchange quality by influencing supervisors' liking for and performance ratings of their subordinates. Results indicated that supervisor-focused tactics affected supervisors' liking for subordinates, which in turn influenced exchange quality. Johnson and Johnson's (1972) found that individuals expect that agreement will facilitate the attainment of goals, an issue of particular importance to an organizational supervisor. Thus, it is clear that the use of influence tactic 'Ingratiation' would result in high quality LMX.

Gender and LMX

The dynamics of the workplace is changing with more and more women entering the work place. Gender is an individual characteristic that affects organizational processes and outcomes, such as recruitment, growth, LMX and performance ratings.

Gender is an individual characteristic that affects organizational processes and outcomes, such as recruitment (Powell, 1987), career growth (Stroh et al, 1992), LMX (Varma & Stroh, 2001) and performance ratings (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Specifically, Varma & Stroh (2001) found that both male and female supervisors exhibited a positive bias towards subordinates of the same sex and gave higher ratings to members of the same gender. They also found a positive effect of same sex dyads on LMX ratings mediated by interpersonal affect. Since most managers are male, they are

likely to select males for advancement and promotion, regardless of their attitudes towards women (Riger and Galligan, 1980).

Two arguments can be given to explain the interaction between gender, ingratiation and LMX. Given the cultural orientations of males in the Indian society where exchanges with the opposite sex are limited, in mixed-gender dyads, effective use of ingratiation by a female member with her male superior is likely to enhance the supervisor's liking toward her (Wayne & Liden, 1994). This liking would lead to higher quality exchanges (Wayne & Ferris, 1990).

The second argument is grounded in ambivalence response amplification (ARA) theory (Katz & Glass, 1979 as quoted in Colella & Varma, 2001). Based on this theory, a personal characteristic may interact with various behaviors to influence LMX relationship if the characteristic is considered as a source of stigma and disadvantage (Colella & Varma, 2001). Heilman, Simon & Repper (1987) found that females assigned leadership roles on the basis of gender had lower self-perceptions of their leadership ability, performance and desire to remain a leader than those assigned on the basis of merit. McCarty (1986) found support for the notion that in absence of feedback, the perception regarding competence and performance for men is higher than for women. Being more self-confident and perceiving themselves as more competent and better performers, men are likely to opt for more difficult goals than their female counterparts. (Locke et al, 1981) found that harder goals lead to better performance. Consequently, men are likely to perform better than women in the jobs they perform. This could generate a self-feeding loop where higher performance feeds confidence further increasing the gap between the self perceptions of men and women in similar organizational positions. Thus both males and females may perceive the personal characteristic of being a female as a source of stigma and disadvantage. As a result, from the ARA theory, if the supervisors react positively to ingratiation, they will react even more positively if the subordinate is a female.

The hypothesis can thus be stated as follows:

Hypothesis

Subordinate ingratiation and subordinate gender will interact to influence LMX quality, such that ingratiation will have a stronger positive impact on LMX relationships for female subordinates than those for male subordinates.

Method

A correlational field study was carried out in which I examined the relationship between subordinate's perception of ingratiation and quality of leader-member exchange.

Sample and Procedures

The sample included working executives of a large organization in Eastern India. The executives came from different departments and from different levels of hierarchy. Questionnaires were given individually to each of the target participants. The participants were assured of confidentiality of their responses and were given ample time to fill up the questionnaires, which included inputs on their age, gender and tenure with the target leader as well. Of the 250 subordinates who were administered the questionnaire, I received 164 (65.6%) usable responses. Of these 47 (28.66%) were women, while 117 (71.34%) were men. The average age of the participants was 37.68 years and the average tenure with the focus leader was 4.36 years.

Measures

Ingratiation

Kumar and Beyerlein's (1991) MIBOS questionnaire was used to measure subordinate's perception of ingratiation. The scale contained 24 questions rated on a five-point scale (1=rarely, and 5=very often). Cronbach alpha was 0.92.

LMX quality

The seven-item LMX scale (Liden et al., 1993) was used to measure subordinate's perception of leader-member exchange quality. Cronbach alpha was 0.91.

Demographic variables

Participants reported their gender, age and their tenure with their leader.

A copy of the questionnaire has been provided in Appendix 1.

Results

Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for ingratiation and LMX scale and then separately for female and male ingratiation and LMX. The results have been shown in table 1.

Ingratiation	LMX
Overall	0.557449
Females	0.682577
Males	0.487635

Table 1

As can be seen, ingratiation is highly correlated with the LMX quality. As hypothesized, subordinate ingratiation and subordinate gender interacted to influence LMX quality, such that ingratiation had a stronger positive impact on LMX relationships for female subordinates than those for male subordinates. The correlation between female ingratiation and LMX was 0.682577 while that between male ingratiation and LMX was 0.487635. Fisher's 'z' test was thereafter carried out to ascertain if this difference was significant.

The correlation values were transformed into 'z' values by using Fisher's equation ($z = 1/2 \ln((1+r)/(1-r))$). The 'z' value for the correlation between female ingratiation and LMX quality came out to 0.833923 while that between male ingratiation and LMX came to 0.532953. Finally the 'z' statistic was computed ($z = z_1 - z_2 / \sqrt{1/(N-3)}$) and its value came out to 3.81889. Since this is greater

than the critical value of 1.96 (normal distribution, $p=0.05$), the difference can be said to be significant. The calculations and results are shown in Appendix 2.

The mean and standard deviations of the items for both the scales is shown in Appendix 3. The score on the ingratiation scale (mean = 2.78) shows that the subordinates in the organization tend to use ingratiation as an influence tactic with their superiors. The score on the LMX quality scale (mean = 3.32) shows that the subordinates in the organization have a perception of good exchange quality with their superiors.

A post-hoc analysis was done to observe the effect of age and dyad tenure on the LMX exchange quality. The regression equation and the results are shown in Appendix 4. While age has no significant effect on LMX quality, dyad tenure has a significant negative effect on the LMX exchange quality.

Discussion

It has been found that subordinate ingratiation and subordinate gender interact to influence LMX quality, such that ingratiation has a stronger positive impact on LMX relationships for female subordinates than those for male subordinates. The finding brings out several important issues.

Firstly, the results provide support for both the similarity-attraction approach and the ambivalence response amplification theory. It is evident that ingratiation would make more of a difference to women subordinates rather than men. The two theories can be further extended to study the effects of other variables such as religion, caste etc in the Indian context for some of these are considered as a source of stigma.

Secondly, the perceptions of ingratiation measured included other enhancement, opinion conformity, rendering favors and self-presentation. Since the difference between the effects of female ingratiation and male ingratiation on LMX quality is significant, it would be interesting to know if there is a significant difference between the type of ingratiation used by the two genders. That would provide a better insight into the different interactions at workplace and would have significant implications for managers at work place.

Thirdly, the phenomenon of glass ceiling can be countered partially if women do better at work place and gain more confidence in themselves and their abilities. Through effective use of ingratiation, they can better the exchange quality with their leaders, which in turn would have positive effects on their performance, satisfaction and commitment. This could enable both themselves and their superiors to think positively about their work and ability.

Fourthly, the findings indicate that women at work place can counter the biases against them by engaging in ingratiating behaviors to their benefit.

Finally, the results highlight the importance of social exchanges in organizations by giving them information about how ingratiation affects LMX and also how gender makes a difference to it.

The study also has several limitations. Being cross-sectional in nature, a causal relationship cannot be ascertained. Moreover, the study was conducted on executive level employees only and therefore, one has to exercise caution before generalizing its findings across various hierarchical levels.

Common method variance cannot be ruled out in this study. The results of the unrotated factor solution show that most items load on to one factor, suggesting that common method variance may be present.

Future research should look at variables like caste and religion in the Indian context since they are considered to be a source of disadvantage. Moreover interactions of gender with age, tenure, caste, religion etc should be studied to look at their interactive effects.

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Appendix 1

Part A

Please indicate the degree to which each item below is true for you, by circling one of the responses

How often do you:

1) Impress upon your supervisor that only he/she can help you in a given situation mainly to make him /her feel good about himself/herself

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

2) Show him / her that you share his/her enthusiasm about his/her new idea even when you may not actually like it.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

3) Try to let him / her know that you have reputation of being liked.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

4) Try to make sure that he/she is aware of your success.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

5) Highlight the achievements made under his/her leadership in a meeting not being attended by him / her.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

6) Give frequent smiles to express enthusiasm/ interest about something he /she is interested in even if you do not like it.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

7) Express work attitudes that are similar to your supervisor's as a way of letting him/her know that the two of you are alike.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

8) Tell him / her that you can learn a lot from his /her experience

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

9) Exaggerate his/her admirable qualities to convey that you think highly of him/her

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

10) Disagree on trivial or unimportant issues but agree on those issues in which he or she expects support from you.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

11) Try to imitate such work behaviors of your supervisor as working late or occasionally working on week ends.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

12) Look for opportunities to let the supervisor know your virtues/ strength.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

13) Ask your supervisor for advice in areas in which he/she think that he/she is smart to let him/her feel that you admire his/her talent.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

14) Try to do things for your supervisor that shows your selfless generosity.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

15) Lookout for opportunities to admire your supervisor.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

16) Let your supervisor know the attitude you share with him/her.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

17) Compliment your supervisor on his /her achievements however trivial it may actually be to you personally.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

18) Laugh heartily at your supervisors' joke even when they are not really funny.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

19) Go out of your way to run an errand for your supervisor.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

20) Offer to help your supervisor by using your personal contacts.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

21) Try to persuasively present your own qualities when attempting to convince your supervisor about your abilities.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

22) Volunteer to be help to your supervisor in matters like locating a good apartment, finding a good insurance agent, etc.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

23) Spend time listening to your supervisor's personal problems even if you have no interest in them.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

24) Volunteer to help your supervisor in his /her work even if it means extra work for you.

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

Part B

Please indicate the degree to which each item below is true for you, by circling one of the responses.

1. Do you know where you stand with your leader...do you usually know how satisfied your leader is with what you do?

Rarely -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Fairly often -- Very often

2. How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs?

Not a bit -- A little -- A fair amount -- Quite a bit -- A great deal

3. How well does your leader recognize your potential?

Not at all -- A little -- Moderately -- Mostly -- Fully

4. Regardless of how much formal authority he/she has built into his/her position, what are the chances that your leader would use his/her power to help you solve problems in your work?
None -- Small -- Moderate -- High -- Very high
5. Again, regardless of the amount of formal authority your leader has, what are the chances that he/she would “bail you out” at his/her expense?
None -- Small -- Moderate -- High -- Very high
6. I have enough confidence in my leader that I would defend and justify his/her decision if he/she were not present to do so.
Strongly disagree -- Disagree -- Neutral -- Agree -- Strongly agree
7. How would you characterize your working relationship with your leader?
Extremely ineffective -- Worse than average -- Average -- Better than average --
Extremely effective

Appendix 2

Scale correlation	0.557449
Female ingratiation (R(female))	0.682557
Male ingratiation (R(male))	0.487635
Sample Size	164
R (male) transformed to Z (male)	0.532953
R (female) transformed to Z (female)	0.833923
Z	3.81889

Appendix 3

Ingratiation Scale

	Mean	SD
Q1	2.841463	1.197846
Q2	2.689024	1.154187
Q3	2.634146	1.228618
Q4	3.04878	1.227521
Q5	3.121951	1.237356
Q6	2.79878	1.157424
Q7	2.920732	1.182618
Q8	3.20122	1.119706
Q9	2.621951	1.219879
Q10	3.103659	1.226591
Q11	2.292683	1.257984
Q12	3.054878	1.1736
Q13	2.97561	1.197908
Q14	2.835366	1.141936
Q15	2.859756	1.134442
Q16	3	1.151153
Q17	3.054878	1.264198
Q18	2.396341	1.191065
Q19	2.20122	1.051904
Q20	2.579268	1.277386
Q21	2.640244	1.08468
Q22	2.256098	1.236569
Q23	2.487805	1.245792

Q24	3.219512	1.167288
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overall	2.784807	0.706116
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LMX

	Mean	SD
Q1	3.262195	1.13431
Q2	3.365854	1.151283
Q3	3.317073	1.106346
Q4	3.243902	1.091641
Q5	2.768293	1.149006
Q6	3.542683	1.109638
Q7	3.72561	1.158199
Overall	3.317944	0.917442